Tanzania's Childcare Ecosystem

Gaps, Challenges, and Opportunities

Content

Photo by Tanzania Early Childhood Education and Care (TECEC)

Background

9.5
million children under age 5 in Tanzania

<5%
of children under 5 years in Tanzania have access to formal childcare

Tanzania has over **9.5 million children under five**, **yet fewer than 5% access to formal childcare**. Most people depend on unregulated, home-based, and informal arrangements. Childcare is vital for achieving child development outcomes, promoting gender equality, and empowering women economically, while also complementing many other Sustainable Development commitments.

Despite several relevant ECD-related policies such as the Law of the Child Act (2009), Child Development Policy (2008), the Education and Training Policy (2014), and gender policy and strategies, the childcare sector remains fragmented, underfunded, and inequitable.

Key Points

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Fragmented policies

Childcare is inconsistently addressed across laws, with weak regulations of informal childcare providers.

Financing gap
Minimal government budget lines; donor-funded pilot projects dominate the provision of childcare.

Low coverage Less than 5% of children under five attend formal childcare, with rural, poor, and disabled children most excluded.

Workforce undervalued
Caregivers lack professional recognition, training, and fair pay.

Opportunities

Ongoing national ECD-related programs such as National Multisectoral Early Childhood Development Programme, Gender Equality Forum, National Plan of Action to end Violence Against Women and Children; ECDP 2021-2026 II, donor interest, and workplace-based childcare offer entry points for scale.

What We Did

Under the support of the **Africa Early Childhood Development Network (AfECN)** and **Global School Forum (GSF)**, a Childcare Landscape Analysis study (2025) was commissioned by TECDEN to the Institute of Social Work and the University of Dodoma.

The overall **objective** of the assignment was to conduct a landscape analysis of Tanzania's childcare ecosystems, identifying challenges, existing gaps, and opportunities for improving childcare interventions and service provision. The specific objectives of the assignment were:

- To explore diverse types of childcare services provided to children at various geographical localities in Tanzania.
- To map out key stakeholders involved directly and indirectly in the care of children, including policymakers, funders, childcare providers, networks, partners, and the sector experts in the country.
- To analyse the challenges and needs of the non-state sector in scaling up childcare programs; and
- To highlight enabling policies and opportunities for partnership with the government and expansion of childcare provisioning in the country.

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Methodology

Evidence was generated from:

Desk Review:
Analysis of 15+ national policies, strategies, laws, and international frameworks related to childcare and ECD.

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs):
30+ interviews with government officials, NGOs, donors, and private sector stakeholders.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):
10 FGDs with parents, caregivers, childcare providers, and community representatives to capture lived experiences.

Participatory Exercise:
Used participatory tools (e.g., mapping and ranking) for childcare providers to co-identify gaps, priorities, and potential solutions.

Analytical Framework:
Evidence was analyzed thematically from policy reviews, interviews, focus groups, and participatory exercises to map gaps and opportunities in Tanzania's childcare ecosystem.

Ethics:
Approved by COSTECH; informed consent and confidentiality safeguards maintained.

Key Results

The landscape analysisrevealed that Tanzania's childcare ecosystem is diverse yet fragmented, with significant disparities in access, quality, and regulation across regions and socioeconomic groups.

Diversity of childcare services
1

Fourmain childcaremodels wereidentified Centre-based, home-based, workplace-based, and residential/institutional care. The majority of childcare for children aged 0–3 is informal and unregulated, often provided by relatives, neighbors, or untrained caregivers. Rural areas rely predominantly on home-based arrangements, while urban settings show a growing presence of private and community day-care centers, though many remain unregistered and lack standardized quality assurance mechanisms.

Stakeholder's landscape
2

ChildcareservicesinTanzania are influenced by a multi-actor environment involving government ministries (MoCDGWSG, MoEST, PO-RALG), development partners, philanthropists, civil society organisations and childcare related networks. However, coordination remains weak to oversee childcare related policies, regulations, and service delivery. This fragmentation has limited coherence in programming, financing, and quality control.

Non-state sector challenges
3

Non-state childcare providers face critical constraints, including limited financing, inadequate training and certification systems for caregivers, lack of standard monitoring tools, and absence of inclusion measures for children with disabilities. Most operate outside formal regulatory frameworks, leading to inconsistent quality and poor working conditions for childcare workers. Despite these challenges, the private and NGO sectors demonstrate innovation and demand-driven service delivery, offering valuable models for scale-up through public–private partnerships.

Enabling environment and policy opportunities
4

While Tanzania has several policies referencing childcare, such as the Law of the Child Act (2009), NMECDP (2021/22–2025/26), and Day Care Centre Guidelines (2020), the study found no unified childcare strategy or dedicated budget line. However, the evolving ECD policy architecture and gender and social protection strategies offer entry points for integration, including the NMECDP, the National Parenting Agenda, and gender equality frameworks. These provide a foundation for establishing a National Childcare Framework or Action Plan that aligns childcare with early learning, nutrition, and women's economic empowerment agendas.

Recommendations

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Develop a National Childcare Strategy/Action Plan

- Consolidate fragmented policies and initiatives into a coherent framework.
- Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of government, civil society, and private sector actors.
- Set measurable goals for access, quality, and equity.

Strengthen Policy and Regulatory Frameworks

- Simplify registration and licensing processes for childcare providers.
- Harmonise existing childcare-related laws and guidelines. Enforce quality standards
- while supporting informal and community-based providers in transitioning to the formal system.

Expand Financing Mechanisms

- Introduce dedicated government budget lines for childcare.
- Leverage public–private partnerships (PPPs) and donor support for scaling.
- Explore innovative financing, including employer-supported childcare and community financing schemes.

Professionalise and Support the Workforce

- Establish accredited training and certification pathways for childcare workers. Provide continuous
- professional development, particularly in disability inclusion and responsive caregiving. Improve
- caregiver remuneration and recognition as a professional cadre.

Recommendations

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Improve Infrastructure and Inclusivity

- Upgrade childcare facilities with safe, stimulating, and disability-inclusive environments.
- Prioritise underserved rural and low-income areas.
- Ensure access to nutrition, health, and protection services within childcare centres.

Enhance Monitoring Evaluation, and Learning

- Move beyond structural indicators to also monitor process quality (caregiver–child interactions, learning environment).
- Equip local government authorities with tools and resources for regular supervision.
- Build feedback loops to inform providers, policymakers, and communities.

Promoting Community and Parental Engagement

- Sensitise communities on the importance of childcare for child development and women's empowerment.
- Encourage men's involvement in childcare.
- Strengthen parental committees and community oversight mechanisms.

Conclusion

The conclusion drawn from the childcare study report (2025) suggests that Tanzania's childcare ecosystem is fragmented, inequitable, heavily reliant on donor funds, and more of informal and unregulated care. Despite having a regulatory framework established under the Child Law Act (2009) and the National Multi-Sectoral Early Childhood Development Programme (NM-ECDP), the formal childcare sector remains underdeveloped.
Key points from the conclusions include:

- **High demand, low supply:** Most children rely on informal childcare due to limited access to formal services.
Disparities in access: Urban and wealthier communities benefit from
- better services, while rural and low-income families are left with substandard alternatives.
Exclusion of vulnerable groups: Children with disabilities and developmental delays are systematically excluded because most centres
- lack infrastructure and trained staff to support them.
Weak workforce support: Caregivers are central to service delivery but often face inadequate training, low pay, and limited institutional recognition.
- **Limited government investment:** Public financing and inter-sectoral coordination remain weak, leaving the system donor-dependent and unsustainable.
Monitoring gaps: Oversight focuses on structural indicators (infrastructure,
- ratios) with insufficient attention to the quality of caregiver–child interactions and developmental outcomes.

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Overall, the study concludes that Tanzania stands at a critical juncture. Addressing childcare challenges requires a systemic, multisectoral response anchored in a National Childcare Action Plan or Strategy. Such a framework should consolidate fragmented efforts, define stakeholder roles, ensure equity and inclusion, and mobilize sustainable financing while integrating childcare into broader development and social protection agendas.

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